5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

346 [727] my was Pagan or Infidel; now the same is observed when the victories are over Christians.

346 The situation of a church is always chosen near running water, for the convenience of their purifica-
● 351 tions and ablutions, in which they observe strictly the
[783] Levitical law. They are always placed upon the top of some beautiful, round hill, which is surrounded entirely with rows of the oxycedrus, or Virginia cedar, which grows here in great beauty and perfection, and is called Arz *. There is nothing adds so much to the beauty of the country as these churches, and the plantations about them.

In the middle of this plantation of cedars is interspersed, at proper distances, a number of those beautiful trees called Cusso, which grow very high, and are all extremely picturesque.

346 All the churches are round, with thatched roofs; their summits are perfect cones; the outside is surrounded by a number of wooden pillars, which are nothing else than the trunks of the cedar-tree, and are placed to support the edifice, about eight feet of the roof projecting beyond the wall of the church, which forms an agreeable walk, or colonade, around it in hot weather, or in rain. The inside of the church is in several divisions, according as is prescribed by the law of Moses. The first is a circle somewhat wider than the inner one; here the congregation sit and pray. Within this is a square, and that square is divided by a veil or curtain, in which is another very

* Ludolf, in his dictionary, says, this word, in Hebrew, signifies any tall tree. In this, however, he is mistaken. The translators did not, indeed, know what tree it was, and so have said this to cover their ignorance; but Arz is as exclusively the oxycedrus, as is an oak or an elm when so named. Arz is indeed a tall tree, but every tall tree is not Arz, which is the Virginia berry-bearing cedar.

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

513 all together in their single room; if to the aroma arising from this combined population be added the acrid [372] smoke from a fire made of dung-cakes, and a plentiful accompaniment of fleas and other insects, the joys of a night's shelter in such quarters may well be imagined.

•351 The house nearly always stands in a very large piece of ground surrounded by a mud and stone wall. It is a curious habit of theirs that in building the wall they generally start with the gateway. Occasionally, for one reason or another, the wall-building suffers a hitch, and one sees the quaint spectacle of a gateway (sometimes with a gate), a few yards of wall, and then nothing to impede general ingress. Some of the chiefs, 342 however, are now building themselves better places, especially those that have been on missions to Europe. But even among these an ordinary *tukul* sometimes suffices, and most of the important chiefs I met in Abyssinia were content with most primitive installations.

The *tukuls* of the poorer class are mostly constructed in a circular form of sticks plastered inside and out with mud. The roof, which is made separately and put on last, is cone-shaped, made of sticks or cane bound strongly together with strips of bark and then thatched: the latter is an art in which the Abyssinians particularly excel. The roof extends two or three feet from the walls; thus the torrential rains run off easily and leave the hut perfectly dry.

342 Inside, a part is usually divided off by a length of 352 sheeting suspended on a string, behind which, on a raised platform, the family sleep on couches or beds made of wood and grass and covered with skins; blankets are uncommon, and the *chammas* in which

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Perhaps this sort of disposition was not unrelated to the part Manz played in sparking the restoration of Amhara rule in Shoa, thereby preparing the way for the dramatic resurgence and expansion of the Ethiopian state at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Gondarē Ethos

The unique character of Gondar derives first of all from the fact that it was a city. During the whole period of Ethiopian history reviewed in this chapter, the Gondar period was the only time in which the emperors resided in a fixed capital, and Gondar was the only permanent population center that grew beyond the contours of a large village. As in ancient Egypt before the rise of Thebes, the concept of the city had played scarcely any role in the political thinking of the Amhara, and so anomalous was the rise of Gondar that Ludolphus, writing in the fifth decade after the founding of Gondar, could not believe stories that Gondar was a large city and predicted that "perhaps in a few years there will be nothing to be seen of it."[38]

Like many oriental cities, Gondar consisted more of a collection of small homogeneous societies than of a diffused heterogeneous urban population. The city was divided into several quarters, each of which lived its own life. The imperial compound was of course foremost of these. It contained the great complex of buildings erected during more than a hundred years, from Fāsil to Iyāsu II, and was the seat of affairs of state. The compound was separated from the rest of the city by a stone wall, whose twelve well-guarded gates each served a special function or class of people.[39]

The nobility resided in a quarter known as Gaing Bēt. Here the dwellings were spaced at comfortable distances, and nearly every house was surrounded by a garden. Abyssinians of lower rank lived in the more densely populated sections of Faras Bēt and Denkākē.

The Christian hierarchy had its own quarters. The *abuna,* an Egyptian monk appointed by the Coptic Patriarch at Alexandria as spiritual head of the Ethiopian Church, lived with his retinue in one sector.[40] Another area, Eçhagē Bēt, was reserved for the Amhara monk who served as administrative head of the Church. Each church compound, moreover, was the focus of another residential section, where its clergy kept their modest huts. The Eçhage Bēt and the church compounds were considered sanctuaries and thus, in theory at least, were secure from plunderers. The Gondarēs and wealthy people from the country used these areas as a safety vault for their valuables.

The ethnic groups which settled in Gondar had their respective ghettos. The Muslims lived in the lower part of the city adjacent to the river Qīha, which was convenient for their ritual ablutions. They were looked down on by the Christians, and meat slaughtered by one group would not be touched by the other. Poncet observed that when an Abyssinian met a Muslim in the

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

pia by a Muslim from the East—suggests a repetition of the Grāñ episode. Finally, there is the previously mentioned conception of the end of the world as a time of renewal, when those who died first will return to life and history will begin again.

Space, like time, is not regarded as an amoral and homogeneous continuum to be submitted to systematic measurement. Land is not something to be bought or sold at will, but belongs by right to a family, a church, or a ruling line. Land titles are defined loosely, by convention and approximation, and the Amhara peasantry have objected to attempts by the government to make exact measurements of their land. The reluctance to rationalize space is conspicuous even in the capital of Ethiopia, where to this day there are no street numbers, so that places can only be identified roughly as near a certain police station or past a certain hospital. Directions are indicated with difficulty. The points of the compass are almost never used, though there are words for the four directions. Instead, the vague terms for "up" and "down" serve to answer almost every question about location.

Though the peasants are often unclear about the precise boundaries of various place names in the countryside, they do know just where the several churches are located over a wide area. It is customary for them to locate a given place by reference to the nearest church. Thus they will say: "He lives below Abbo" or "We must travel above Mikā'ēl." As a result, locations in space are identified by the same set of co-ordinates as are events in time, namely, the names of the saints. Moreover, just as certain months each year are occasions for special celebrations in behalf of each sacred figure, so in the countryside certain churches are considered especially holy shrines. Thus, there is special veneration for *Ṭerr Māryām* ("St. Mary's Day in the month of Ṭerr") and Gishēn Māryām ("St. Mary's Church in the district of Gishēn").

The dominant configuration in the Amhara's experience of space is that of concentric circles. Whether or not we try to relate this to the cyclical organization of time, the fact remains that the pattern of a charged center surrounded by circles of decreasing significance recurs in the main areas of Amhara life.

It appears, first, in his architecture. The traditional peasant home is round, with a conical roof supported by a pole that rises in the center of the circle. This is the domestic inner sanctum, a room for eating and talking and getting warm by the fire. It is often separated by a circular partition from sections that serve for storage, cooking, and animals. The compound in which the home stands is surrounded in some regions by a stone or brush fence, a boundary that separates the residential kin group from the whole outside world.

This pattern is more fully developed in the churches, which are round like the huts but larger and contain two concentric circular partitions inside. The